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ABSTRACT

The coming decade will be a more significant period for the relationship of education to vocation and work than any other period in U.S. history. No longer will life be divided into periods of preschool play, formal learning, forty years of work, and decline; rather, these periods will interlock, especially as continued learning becomes increasingly necessary for work. Thus, the definition of a student must be changed, and likewise the areas of educational content and structure. Schools must recognize that they are dealing with students who have flexible and multiple demands and that their structures must be flexible and permit these alternative demands. An example of a flexible college is located in New York at Empire State College which operates through urban learning centers, instead of a campus, and permits students to develop their own course of study. Educational content must change so that people no longer think of liberal vs. vocational education. Schools must assist students to deal not only with intellectual ideas, but also with the practical application of these ideas. Notions that one field surpasses another in dignity and worthiness need to be dropped from society's thinking. If schools do not make these adjustments in structure and content, new kinds of institutions will emerge to fulfill these needs. (ELG)

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REMARKS OF

Ernest L. Boyer

U.S. Commssioner of Education

at the

annual joint meeting

of

The State and National Advisory Councils

on Vocational Education

Washington, D.C.

May 4, 1978

I am pleased to be with you today and to have the opportunity to chat informally about several matters of concern to me and to this important assembly.

I'll begin by making several candid comments about the administration of the vocational programs in the Office of Education. I am deeply disappointed that we have still not selected a Deputy to manage those essential programs. I am not only disappointed, but also embarrassed.

It would be awkward if not professionally inappropriate for me to describe the difficulties we have encountered in finding a Deputy for the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education. But it would be a gross misinterpretation to think we have been casual or indifferent about the matter. In fact, no appointment has received more time, attention, and concern. It is one of the most crucial I have to make.

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I consider it a top priority, and I assure you that this position is going to be filled -- and very soon -- by a Deputy capable of strong leadership.

He must be a strong leader because we are entering what I'm convinced will be the most significant period of the relating of work to education that this country has ever seen.

There's a big job to be done, and we're going to get on with it, we're going to have superb leadership, and we are going to be working with those of you in the States who are on the firing line and have been delivering on this for a long, long time.

If you look at the history of the Office of Education since its founding in 1867, you'll find that the first 75 years or so were devoted to gathering data and reporting to Congress. In fact -- and this is an interesting footnote -- the first Commissioner, Henry Barnard, came to this job because he was a good writer and loved to write reports. He fitted beautifully into the job. His only assignment was to report to Congress on the state of American education. The only problem was he so much loved to write reports that it took him 18 months to write his first annual report to Congress. Congress was offended -- first, because

it took him so long to get that report to the Hill -- setting a precedent honored to this day -- and, second, because it was 900 pages long. This distressed Congress so much that it appropriated only sufficient funds to print 35 of the 900 pages. Rumor has it that during markup one member of the committee said it could be any 35 as far as he was concerned, and randomly selected at that.

For about 75 years that's all the Commissioner was to do. But this doesn't mean he had an easy time of it. There were no State education departments to consult on the report in those days. You had to tell anecdotes and all kinds of gossippy little things about what was going on in the States, all of which usually offended the Senators mightily. What's more, you couldn't reduce the report to cold statistics. So all in all it was really a tough job to be Commissioner, not easy at all.

But how tough it really could be became evident with World War I.

The commitment of this country to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 in my judgment was one of the three landmark transition points affecting the Federal role in education. Another was the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, and the third was the Higher Education Amendments of 1972.

But clearly the involvement of the Federal Government in promoting excellence, access, and utility in education began with the Smith-Hughes Act, which has been so significantly tied to the development of our country and of education.

I predict that the coming decade will be a more significant period in terms of education as it relates to vocation and work than any other period in the Nation's history.

The old notions about who is a college student, who is a high school student, and who is a continuing education student are dramatically beginning to change. For the first time in our history the idea has become obsolete that students are to be held captive in schools in their earlier years -- and then leave formal education to engage in something called work for the rest of their lives, unengaged in further education. For the first time in our history we are entering a period in which students are beginning to understand that they can be engaged in education and in work at the same time.

In spite of the rigidities and the resistance of our institutions, especially higher education institutions, the students in this country, the citizens of this country,

are redefining the nature of what a student is, and they are the ones who are imposing upon us the new definition that a student can be in both education and work.

I submit to you that this new pattern of education is going to continue throughout a student's lifetime. It is no longer acceptable to say that, once a student has finished formal education, he or she has 40 years of labor followed by something called dignified decline. We can no longer slice up our life into periods of preschool play, formal learning, 40 years of work, and then decline. We are now discovering that it is possible to interlock these periods and that life can now take on a new utility and a new richness.

There's a practicality to this as well. How many of us can stop formal education and believe, seriously believe, that for the next 30 or 40 or 50 years we can remain detached from education? That may have been possible in the days of backbreaking labor, when so many human beings were little more than machines, but it's no longer possible, given the nature of our occupations and our own vision of human dignity. In fact, at the college level, the notion of getting a bachelor's degree and using it as intellectual currency for the rest of one's life no longer holds.

One of the trials I have faced in life, shared by those who are here today, has been the commencement speech. It is really one of the most pernicious aspects of academic life. On one occasion several years ago I told a graduating class that, if we were truly honest about the nature of the bachelor's degree and the nature of our world, we would probably have an arrangement whereby the student would lose a percentage of his academic credits every year after graduation -- say a 6 percent credit deduction. After 10 years or so he would suddenly discover he no longer had a degree because it had become obsolete -- unless he were putting intellectual money back into the bank.

As time passes, all of our educational experience becomes obsolete. So we might have an inverse interest arrangement by which students would have to come back. Now that may seem a bit frivolous at first, but let me ask you this: If you go to a doctor's office, glance around at the diplomas on the wall, and see he received his medical degree in 1935 -- even if it were from a very fine medical school -- you might break out in a kind of cold sweat if you saw nothing to suggest he's been studying medicine since. The truth is, given the advances in medicine during the past half century, the doctor who is practicing only what he learned up to 1935 is a quack.

My wife was an RN, and I wrested her from the profession in those days when that was thought to be honorable. After about 20 years she went back to practice and came home to say that the profession was now not even familiar to her. I might add that she now happens to be a full-time student as a nurse-midwife at Georgetown University and has an entirely new career. She's now able to deliver babies.

We now have a definition of the nursing profession that wasn't even dreamed of not very many years ago. And that's true in law, it's true in economics, it's true in physics. My brother was in physics, and after being in administration he went back to teach and hardly recognized the textbooks.

In our lifetime we have had such an acceleration of knowledge, such a redefinition of what is social policy, that it's unthinkable that anyone would seek to ply his or her trade without the notion of continued learning -- and that says nothing about the richness and excitement that go with continued learning.

I'm suggesting, then, that we have redefined the student, that this will be with us during the decades ahead, and that essentially this will call for a redefinition in two other areas. We have to redefine content, and we have to redefine structure.

Let me talk first about the structure and then the content.

I think it is no longer possible for our schools to run in ways that require students to be their captives all their waking hours. We must find ways to have flexibility in the design so that students can live in several different worlds at the same time. I predict that institutions that want to hold a claim on the lives of students without recognizing that they might have other obligations too are going to become increasingly obsolete.

The institutions of education of the future will be the ones that recognize they are dealing with students who have flexible and multiple demands and that we need institutional structures that are flexible and permit alternative demands. This is true not only for adults, although that is crucial. It is also increasingly true in my view for upper division high school students, who must begin not only to engage in formal study but also to begin to experiment and test themselves in productive work as well.

We must find ways for the earlier maturation of our students, their increased restlessness, their pseudo understanding through television and the like, to be tested

in the realities of the world beyond the formal classroom. If we don't do that we're going to be at war with students who see the institution not as a place of freedom but as a place of constraint. And, if students feel they are at war with the institution, we get the crisis of dropout, the crisis of delinquency, the crisis of drugs, the crisis of discipline. These are secondary effects of the primary problem of an institution that is not flexible enough to allow students to engage themselves in interests beyond the classroom while still under the guidance of the institution.

I'm not suggesting at all that students are to be encouraged to leave without tutelage. They are to be guided, but I think flexibility is the key.

When I became chancellor in New York we had 72 institutions. Each had a campus, each had a library, each had a president, each had a faculty. What we didn't have was an arrangement to accommodate students who didn't want a campus, or couldn't use a campus. I said the only college I could ever imagine starting -- since we had 72 of the regular type -- would be a college that didn't have a campus.

I thought that maybe we could set up learning centers for students who, under the guidance of faculty mentors, could develop their own course of study and do it in a way that recognized their ability to study independently and that also recognized that many of them had to work as well as study.

Happily, they could pursue their education in a State that had a network of formal institutions which could give them access to libraries and other necessary facilities. So we created a non-campus college for the entire State and named it Empire State College, with learning centers in urban areas throughout the State.

The idea took hold but, as you might suspect, our problem was budget. We always had thousands of students who wished to enroll but not enough faculty to guide them all.

But the idea was valid. It has drawn into higher learning thousands of students who could not live in a residence hall, who could not follow the 9 to 5 sequence of formal classes, but who desperately want to continue their education. They are some of the best students in the State. They are motivated, they have a goal, they are intelligent. They had just got tangled up in the system -- a system that should be able to serve students, not suppress them.

We have a changing pattern of students and so must have a changing pattern of structure. And that leads me to a changing pattern of content.

One of the most tragic things about our education system is the way we have allowed the liberal vs. vocational education frame of mind to develop. This has caused us to think in categories that are not valid, and we have hurt students by forcing them into these categories. It's tragic that we have not recognized a simple fact of the human condition -- the fact that we all work. Choosing our work is one of the most profoundly crucial decisions any of us must make and reflects our most fundamental social as well as personal values.

When an institution suggests to its students that determining what their work will be is a secondary consideration, it strikes at the very nature of our social system. When I choose a vocation, I am in a very real sense defining who I am as a human being and where I fit in the social structure.

Let me paraphrase a saying from our Greek heritage: "I work, therefore I am." That may be an exaggeration of the point I am making, but when we meet somebody one of our earliest questions is "What do you do?" That is,

"How have you chosen to fill your time on earth?" Choosing our work has to be one of our most fundamental decisions. Failing to help students prepare to face this decision, failing to guide them through the philosophical, social, and even economic aspects involved in the decision is to deny them the opportunity to make one of the most basic searches that education should provide.

In my view every education institution and every student should be helped not only to deal with the world of ideas in the intellectually interesting and abstract sense but also in the practical application of ideas.

I have always been a bit impatient with the faculty member who says, "I'm sorry. This is a college (or school). We're not involved in vocational matters." This very faculty member is very likely devoting every waking hour to making sure he gets tenure. You can't tell me that he feels work is not important. He prizes work, he works at it, he even occasionally fights about it. To say to students "you shouldn't be interested in this" is to convey a most dishonest message.

Of course work is important. I don't say that every conceivable job in a culture should have academic origins.

I do say that the issue of work and where one is going to spend his or her time -- and the opportunity early-on to make vocational experiments and to consider and test vocational options -- have to be central to the education enterprise.

I would also say that over the years we have made unfortunate distinctions conveying the idea that in our culture there are legitimate and illegitimate ways to spend one's time.

It's all right on many campuses to prepare to be a doctor, but it's not all right to be a nurse. It's all right if you want to be an engineer, but if you want to be a computer programmer, that's not quite so good. It's all right if you want to be an archeologist and sort through the cultures of the past, but if you want to be a social worker, and try to push your way through the jungles of the present, that's less admirable. It's all right to read the great literature of the past, but if you want to write about the present -- as a journalist perhaps -- a lot of colleges just don't rate that very highly.

And one of the most distressing points: It's all right if you want to teach in college, but if you want to teach first grade, which is a much tougher job, "I'm sorry. That's not quite dignified."

Now what kind of nonsense underlies these arbitrary distinctions? People who make them give students feelings of worthiness or unworthiness, dignity or lack of dignity, as the case may be.

What we should be looking for are ways to expand the options and give equal dignity to students no matter what their vocational interests may be. If our schools are making any tragic error, it is that they are drawing not only a false line between learning and work but also a false line between legitimate and illegitimate categories of work.

Again I say that the institutions of the future will be the ones that become more flexible in their structure and more flexible in their content, too. We have changed dramatically from labor to service industries. Yet how many of our institutions, schools or colleges, are moving realistically to accommodate the world that's out there?

If there's a major mismatch it will be the institutions that suffer.

I predict that if our institutions don't adjust to the new student, to the new structure, and to the new content, then new kinds of institutions will emerge that will do just that. In fact, they've already emerged. Let me give you a couple of examples.

I had dinner two nights ago with someone from a major industry. He asked, "Have you visited our campus in Virginia?" I said, "No. I try to get around, but what did I miss?" Well, this company -- and this is not at all novel -- has a campus, a thousand students, dormitories, classes, up-to-date technology, and it is filled every day of the week.

In Buffalo a couple of years ago I went to a Holiday Inn. I picked up a magazine -- a kind of house organ -- and I was intrigued by the cover story. It had a great big fancy picture of a campus and underneath was a big banner: "Holiday Inn University." Holiday Inn University! Then I read the story. It has a campus in the South, even has a board of trustees.

We have to confront changes that are important and, more than that, intellectually and socially legitimate.

It seems to me I have now come full circle. If we're smart enough, aggressive enough, thoughtful enough, the years just ahead can be some of the most exciting for formal education as we try to link it to its students. I start there and I stop there -- not in speaking about work as such, but about the nature of our students and about the nature of the world we're in.

Marv,* you were generous in your introduction. Let me say a few things about the Fashion Institute. Its structure has been expanded. Now Marv has a 1-year certificate, a 2-year degree, a 3-year certificate, and a 4-year baccalaureate in certain fields of technology. In addition, the Fashion Institute offers work in fields that are related to the industries of the city. The Fashion Institute is so popular that 60 percent of the applicants are turned away. The sort of student who applies to the Fashion Institute wants an education that is not only intellectual but also useful and available in the best and most sophisticated way. To say that has not been a part of education is to deny our history.

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*Dr. Marvin J. Feldman, president of the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City, part of the State University of New York.

A year and a half ago I was on a pleasant sabbatical in Cambridge. During that time I read a marvelous novel by C.P. Snow entitled "The Masters." The story is about the politics of how the colleges of Cambridge select their head. It's not a very happy story because academic politics there are as vicious in some respects as academic politics here. But what interested me most was Snow's brief history of Cambridge, which was founded in the 12th century.

In those days Cambridge was nothing more than a grubby little group of shacks along the Cam river. A few clerics came as scholars. And that was the university. There were no facilities to speak of. The young men were as poor as could be. They studied by candlelight. They slept in shacks on straw.

Snow asks why they did all this. He then gave the answer, and it was a blockbuster: Because they wanted jobs!

To go to Cambridge University because you want a job? One evening, chatting at high table, I mentioned this to one of the scholars. He almost choked on his sherry!

I mention this to point out that education has always been viewed as a utilitarian linkage between intellectual accomplishment and what makes life worthwhile.

Education and work have always been blended. Why? Because that's the way our lives are blended. That's the nature of our existence on earth. And education has to confront this integration, or students will find some way to do it on their own. This will not be easy. But I think that if we can somehow affirm this integration as transcending any program, and do so with vision, our future will be most exciting.

I think there is a job to do in this city in getting together the various components of the education process. I think it is very important that the connections between the Labor Department and HEW increase. CETA is essential. We need to get students jobs, and get them quickly, in the urban areas. But we also need to make sure that those jobs are combined with increased training and usefulness so they do not end up as frustrating dead-ends. We need not only to solve the economic problems involved, but also to build up essential human talent and resources so that these people can continue to work on their own. That's our job.

Secretary Marshall and Secretary Califano signed a joint agreement between Labor and HEW saying we are going to try to work this out together. And just this week I met with Ernie Green, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training, to staff this HEW-Labor Committee to make sure we're moving with full coordination so that we can bring education and work together in Administration policy. I know there's been work on the Hill to see that the reauthorization activities also reflect this essential coordination.

We have a large job to do. There's an honorable heritage, but in my view there is a still more fundamental future to confront. Students are changing. Our institutions must change, and our curriculums must change if we're going to meet the challenge of the future -- and the Washington bureaucracy perhaps must change as well.

Thank you very much for inviting me.